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## **A Healthy View of Mental Health for Children**

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Emotions are complicated in all people regardless of age. Children feel the same emotions as adults yet lack the language and skill to communicate the complications emotions cause. A child may be able to express sad, happy, and scared. A child may not be able to distinguish between depression, anxiety, or resilience. Positive mental health does not mean happiness all the time. It means being able to understand and function when under pressure.

Trusted adults make a lifelong impact on a child's life. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported youth who experience strong connections to others were 48 percent to 66 percent less likely to have mental health issues or experience risky behavior. Contributions to poor mental health include social, biological, and/or psychological factors.

Stress and worry can be a healthy part of life. A healthy reaction of stress can be rewarded by making a goal in a game or successfully walking out on stage for the first time. An anxiety disorder is worry beyond a specific event to general living. If worry or anxiety interferes with ability to learn in school, it is a sign to see a professional specializing in mental health.

Feelings of sadness, worthlessness, tiredness, or anger occur from time to time. Depression is when these feelings continue for two or more weeks. Depression is more than being down. Emotions may ebb and flow but if left unchecked, daily activities become increasingly difficult. Mental health illnesses and depression may lead to suicide. The CDC has identified suicide as the third leading cause of death for youth 10 to 14 years old and the second leading cause of death in people 15 to 24 years old.

Do not try to diagnose mental health issues. Always consult a health professional with concerns.

The ability to positively react or bounce back from difficulty is called resilience. Think of a rubber band as it stretches. The rubber band relaxes back into its starting shape or it might break when stretching too far. If a person has emotional setbacks but can learn from the experience, they are displaying resilience. Luckily, resilience can be developed throughout life. The American Psychological Association suggests making connections with others, accepting change as part of life, defining goals, developing a hopeful outlook, and providing for physical needs.

In everyday conversation, phrases from mental health are used incorrectly as slang. One example is "I'm going crazy." Think before you speak to take the stigma of mental health out of your vocabulary. Instead say "I'm frustrated." Consider how someone struggling with mental health may feel when negative slang is interjected. Be an example, avoid negative labels and hurtful slang. Encourage open communication about emotions daily. Read books with children to safely explore healthy feelings and introduce acceptance of all emotions. Help youth explore emotions and the reactions emotions create. Nebraska Extension provides connection to resources and believes in staying connected during tough times.

Some available resources include

- [Rural Response Hotline](#): 800-464-0258
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 800-273-8255
- [The Boys Town National Hotline](#): Not just for boys: 800-448-3000
- [Nebraska Family Helpline](#): Resource for parents with any issue: 800-866-8660

*Source: Dellifield and Raines, Your Thoughts Matter, Navigating Mental Health, Ohio State University Extension, National 4-H.*